

Springfield Public Schools



December 3, 2014

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Jennifer E. Gill
Superintendent

Dear Sir/Madame:

I am writing today in response to FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler's recently announced proposal to raise the E-Rate funding cap by \$1.5 billion. The E-Rate program currently represents the only source of federal funding aimed at educational technology and is critical in providing discounts to assist schools (like mine) to obtain affordable telecommunications and internet access. As Superintendent of Springfield Public School District 186 in Springfield, Illinois, I strongly support the infusion of the additional funding, and urge you to do the same.

Springfield Public Schools serves approximately 15,000 students from pre-school through high school. Currently, the student population is 68 percent low income. The District continues to strive to create a 21st century learning environment. However, the State of Illinois is only providing 89 percent of the general state aid funding. As we are compelled to move forward with providing more access to technology, Springfield Public Schools must maximize the E-Rate funding opportunities. Most recently, the E-Rate funding has allowed the District to upgrade infrastructure to increase Internet connectivity speeds and support additional technologies in the classroom. These upgrades will better equip Springfield Public Schools to administer the new Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments. It will also give us the ability to utilize technology to support individualized student learning.

To raise the cap of the E-Rate program by \$1.5 billion, the Universal Service Fund fee will increase by 16 cents per month per account. 16 additional cents per month—less than half a penny per day—totals to an additional \$1.92 per year, approximately the cost of a cup of coffee. This proposal is both reasonable and justified, asking contributors to forgo one cup of coffee over the course of a year to ensure that our nation's schools and libraries are connected to the internet in a way that supports 21st century learning and prepares them for post-secondary opportunity.

No one questions that it is time to ensure that our libraries and schools are connected with the quality of connectivity that is sufficient and scalable for today's ever-growing connectivity needs. In less than twenty years since Congress established the program, E-Rate played a critical role in transforming levels of connectivity from less than one-quarter of schools and libraries to nearly all connected today. The E-Rate program's work is not done: Achieving the laudable broadband goals adopted by the Commission

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in July will require additional investment. The biggest obstacle the E-Rate program faces, even with the recent changes, remains the strain of increasing demand for E-Rate-supported services and persistently low funding.

The single most effective step the FCC can take to bolster E-Rate's current and future success is to ensure that the program's funding is adequate to support, in a sustainable manner, the program's changes and goals as adopted in July. Chairman Wheeler's proposal does just that, representing a deliberate effort to expand educational opportunities for our nation's students. By focusing on high-capacity broadband connections to the internet (particularly those in rural communities) and providing sustained, additional funding to the E-Rate program, the modernized E-Rate will ensure the nation's schools—including mine—are able to keep pace with ever increasing connectivity needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer E. Gill". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Jennifer E. Gill
Superintendent of Schools